International Seabed Authority ISBA/24/FC/8

Finance Committee

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Review of costs of conference services and implementation of other cost-saving measures

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Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. During the twenty-third session, the Finance Committee expressed its appreciation for the efforts being made to effect savings in the budget of the Authority and took note of the measures taken by the Secretary-General to constrain any further unexpected increases in the overall cost of conference services.

2. The Committee also requested the Secretary-General to continue those efforts to ensure cost reductions and to submit a report thereon in 2018, including on the status of conference costs. The present report responds to that request.

II. Costs of conference services

3. The table below shows the main cost components for conference services from 2014 to 2017. As described in ISBA/23/FC/8, significant savings were achieved in 2017 through various measures, including a reduction in the number of United Nations support staff from nine to two (estimated savings: $120,000), better coordination with the Jamaica Conference Centre (savings: $20,000), a reduction in documentation costs and the introduction of a paper-smart system (savings: $80,000). It is important, however, to distinguish between cost reductions and cost variations; for example, costs may be higher in a budget year or when there are several applications for approval of plans of work.

* ISBA/24/FC/L.1.

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Overview of conference service costs, 2014–2017

(United States dollars)

Designation	*2014*	*2015*	*2016*	*2017*
Miscellaneous conference services	236 803	124 466	115 908	108 458
Rentals	75 829	77 891	79 471	51 231
Meeting services (including interpretation)	856 482	1 109 191	1 045 364	718 644
Documentation	742 962	801 366	818 360	473 203
Total	**1 912 076**	**2 112 914**	**2 059 102**	**1 351 537**
Offset against application fees	687 993	224 959	593 202	31 204

4. In accordance with the decision of the Assembly, the secretariat installed remote interpretation facilities in 2018, and remote simultaneous interpretation services were provided during the meetings of the Legal and Technical Commission in March 2018. Initial feedback from the members of the Commission suggests a positive and encouraging overall experience. Remote services will also be deployed for the meetings of the Finance Committee and of the Legal and Technical Commission in July.

5. The use of remote simultaneous interpretation services has had a dual impact on the costs of conference services:

(a) The interpretation services provided by the company Interprefy are considerably less expensive than those provided by the United Nations;

(b) The Authority does not have to cover the costs of travel or the daily subsistence allowance for interpreters from Interprefy.

6. Using Interprefy will result in savings conservatively estimated at $180,000 for 2018, even though two more weeks of meetings are scheduled in the current session.

7. The secretariat has also implemented a different presentation of the budget for the costs of conference services. Those costs are now listed by type instead of by organ of the Authority. This will allow better monitoring of expenditure, better planning of conference service costs based on historical costs, and more transparency.

8. Overall, those cost-cutting measures will result in 20 per cent savings on conference services for the twenty-fourth session.

III. Other cost-saving measures

9. As approved in the budget for the financial period 2017–2018, the Authority replaced all fluorescent lighting with light-emitting diodes (LEDs) in January 2018, at a cost of $22,457.07. All electricity consumption for lighting during the first quarter of 2018 can be attributed to the new lighting system, and electricity costs for the first quarter of 2018 amounted to $4,342.67, down from $5,912.07 for the first quarter of 2017. This represents a reduction of $1,569.40 over three months, or approximately $6,000 per year, indicating that the investment will pay for itself in three years and eight months.

10. Another cost-cutting measure that the secretariat intends to explore is to change the way it purchases air tickets. There is no real competition among travel agents in Jamaica, and air tickets bought through those agents are often far more expensive than those purchased online or from vendors at a major hub. The secretariat plans to outsource the purchase of air tickets through the liaison office in New York, where

there is more competition and where tickets could be purchased from the travel agent used by the United Nations, if competitive, thereby allowing the Authority to benefit from special rates. This measure will be investigated during the remaining months of 2018.